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CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

THE LIFE OF ISSA.

About a year ago a little book was published in French by a Russian who calls himself Nicolas Notovitch, and its title is *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ, by the Discoverer of the Manuscript*. The sensation which it naturally created has made it known over the whole civilised world, so that the English translation which we now have before us commands an extraordinarily large sale.

Mr. Nicolas Notovitch's book is a curious and interesting production. It contains the accounts of the author's journey to Tibet. There are a few thrilling hunter's stories. Our hair is made to stand on end by the report of the horrible death of a coolie in the clutches of a hungry panther, devouring his victim and escaping in the dark. We hear of the successful killing of a black bear. The mind is relieved by an ethnological discussion of the piquant institution of polyandry; then again our attention is engaged by a dramatic description of a pageant such as we are accustomed to witness on the stage. Several discussions with Buddhistic lamas are introduced whose long speeches are ill-disguised reproductions of the author's own religious views, which occasionally ooze out in other parts of the book. Hearing of a manuscript on the life of Issa (which is the Tibetan form of the name of Jesus), he sets out in search of the manuscript of the valuable work, and at last happily finds it through the unfortunate accident of a broken leg. Here again the author surprises us with a report of wonderful adventures, and we must admire his extraordinary physique and almost superhuman endurance. Having broken his leg above the knee, he orders his servants to take him to Himis, which, as he says, was only half a day's journey, one man constantly supporting his injured limb, another man leading his horse by the bridle. Having reached Himis at a late hour of the night he was well received by the monks and borne to their best chamber. Without telling us how he passed the night, he continues :

"The succeeding morning I encased the injured member in thin boards held together with strings, and did my best to remain motionless. A favorable result was soon apparent, and two days later I was well enough to undertake a slow journey toward India, in quest of a physician,"

In these two days, which, after half a day's journey with a broken leg, he spent at the Himis convent, Mr. Notovitch found sufficient composure to make himself acquainted with the contents of the manuscript of the life of Issa. He says :

"The venerable director of the gonpa entertained me with interesting accounts of their belief and the country in general. . . . Finally, yielding to my earnest solicitations, he brought forth two big volumes in cardboard covers, with leaves yellowed by the lapse of time, and read the biography of Issa, which I carefully copied from the translation of my interpreter."

Then follows the translation of the manuscript of the life of Issa, with the author's comments. The manuscript gives in Sections II and III a brief report of the history of the children of Israel, making, however, Mossa (Moses) the younger son of King Pharaoh. The fourth section informs us of the Eternal Spirit, who sees fit to incarnate himself again in a human being. The child is called Issa ; and having attained the age of thirteen years, when an Israelite should take a wife, he clandestinely left his father's house and travelled towards Sindh, "to study the laws of the great Buddhas." Section V tells us of Issa's experiences in India, his denial of the divine origin of the Vedas, his denial of the Trimurti, his denunciations of Hindu caste institutions, and his condemnation of idol-worship ; he said :

"The Eternal Judge, the Eternal Spirit, composes the one and indivisible soul of the universe, which alone creates, contains, and animates the whole.

"He alone has willed and created, he alone has existed from eternity and will exist without end ; he has no equal neither in the heavens nor on this earth.

"The Great Creator shares his power with no one, still less with inanimate objects as you have been taught, for he alone possesses supreme power.

"He willed it, and the world appeared ; by one divine thought, he united the waters and separated them from the dry portion of the globe. He is the cause of the mysterious life of man, in whom he has breathed a part of his being.

"And he has subordinated to man, the land, the waters, the animals, and all that he has created, and which he maintains in immutable order by fixing the duration of each.

"The wrath of God shall soon be let loose on man, for he has forgotten his Creator and filled his temples with abominations, and he adores a host of creatures which God has subordinated to him.

"For, to be pleasing to stones and metals, he sacrifices human beings in whom dwells a part of the spirit of the Most High.

"For he humiliates them that labor by the sweat of their brow to gain the favor of an idler who is seated at a sumptuously spread table.

"They that deprive their brothers of divine happiness shall themselves be deprived of it, and the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas shall become the Soudras of the Soudras with whom the Eternal shall dwell eternally.

"For on the day of the Last Judgment, the Soudras and the Vaisyas shall be forgiven because of their ignorance, while God shall visit his wrath on them that have arrogated his rights."

Note here how modern Christ is when referring to the labor question.

"Six years later," we are told in Section VI, "being persecuted, Issa, whom the

"Buddha had chosen to spread his holy words, went from place to place preaching monotheism, denouncing idolatry, and proclaiming the ethics of universal kindness. At last he returns to Palestine, where the rulers of the cities, and especially Pilate, the governor of Jerusalem, attempted to take his life, but the priests and the learned men of the Hebrews defend him and succeed for some time in protecting him. The spies of Pilate, however, succeed in implicating Issa into new accusations, whereby Issa takes occasion to admonish his disciples to respect women and to be submissive to their wives. Put into a dungeon, the Jews tried to save him, but in vain, and Issa was nailed to the cross between two thieves. The priests and the wise men of the Hebrews washed their hands in a sacred vessel, saying: 'We are innocent of the death of a just man.' As the multitude prayed over the tomb of Issa three days after his death, and filled the air with weeping and wailing, the governor, fearing a general uprising of the people, sends his soldiers to take up the body and bury it elsewhere. When the sepulchre was found open and empty, the rumor was spread that God, the Supreme Judge, had sent his angels to take away the mortal remains of the saint in whom dwelt a part of the Divine Spirit."

The comments which the author adds are peculiarly interesting as they furnish abundant evidence that the manuscript is nothing but an exposition of Mr. Notovitch's own religious opinions. Yet he appears honestly to believe in the anachronism that his views were held at the beginning of the Christian era, for he does not seem to doubt that the life of Issa as told in the Himis manuscript was written shortly after Christ's death.

After this analysis of the book, which is a mixture of everything which is liable to excite the reader's sentiments, it is scarcely necessary to enter into a detailed criticism or to raise the question whether or not the manuscript is genuine. Mr. Notovitch expresses his confidence that further investigations will verify his report. Up to date we have little evidence which will verify or contravene Mr. Notovitch's statements; but the little which we have is against him. According to the Philadelphia *Sunday School Times* "The Rev. F. B. Shawe, a Moravian missionary of Leh, the chief town of Ladakh, has just asserted (1) that Buddhists do not venerate Jesus, or Issa, at all; (2) that his colleagues have had easy access to the very monastery named by Notovitch for forty years, and never so much as heard of such a Life; (3) that no one in that vicinity can be found who has seen or heard of Notovitch; (4) that the monks deny that they have any old books,—least of all, one 1694 years old, or a copy of it; and that (5) Páli is an unknown language to any native of Ladakh."

We wish to add two remarks.

First, the existence of an apocryphal gospel written by some Buddhist hagiographer as a blending of Christianity with Buddhism is by no means impossible, yet, if such a book were found, it would possibly contain many traces, not of Mr. Notovitch's religious views, but of peculiarly Buddhistic tenets; and among them

the most prominent ones would be those of the sect to which the author of such a gospel had belonged. In addition it would misrepresent Jewish social conditions in a different way from Mr. Notovitch's life of Issa, as a Buddhistic author would color the report with the notions of the social conditions in which he lives. Should such a manuscript be found it would naturally, as does Mr. Notovitch's manuscript, represent Issa as having acquired his wisdom in India, but this, of course, would be poor historical evidence to prove that Jesus really had travelled to India.

Secondly, we have to say, considering the popular interest taken in the affinity of Buddhistic with Christian ethics, and the prolific exuberance of theosophic literature, it is strange that no one ever attempted, before the appearance of Mr. Notovitch's booklet, to invent a story which in the shape of a novel, or otherwise, would provide the public with a Buddhistic-Christian gospel, such as many people would like to see.

Mr. Notovitch's book, we repeat, is curious and interesting; but the reader who has not his grave doubts as to the authenticity of the manuscript of the life of Issa, must be possessed of an unusual amount of naiveté. Whatever may have been the author's intention in writing the book, he did his work most ingeniously, for the very crudeness with which he urges his claims is well calculated to captivate the crude taste of the masses who would remain unaffected by a more refined and historically more probable production. Had the manuscript of the life of Issa been written with a better historical knowledge of the past, it would undoubtedly have failed to interest the masses whose attention can be captivated only by a literature which anticipates their wishes and reproduces their own thoughts. Goethe says:

"Darf man das Volk betrügen?
Ich sage nein!
Doch willst du sie belügen,
Mach's nur nicht fein."

P. C.